

Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

1
A9 84Pro
12220
New Rules

HOW TO APPLY FOR AND USE FOOD STAMPS



U.S. Department of Agriculture
Food and Nutrition Service
Program Aid No. 1226



The Food Stamp Program helps low-income households buy the food they need for good health. Under agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, State public assistance agencies run the program through their local offices. The basic program rules are the same everywhere. This booklet explains the rules, and tells you how to apply for and use food stamps. For more information, ask your local food stamp office.



1 FILE AN APPLICATION FORM

- The food stamp office will give you an application form on the same day you ask for one. You can ask for it in person, over the phone or by mail, or someone else may get one for you.
- The office will accept the form on the same day you turn it in, even if they cannot interview you on that day.
- Fill in your name, address, telephone number and signature on the form and as much other information as you can. Give or send the form to the office as soon as possible. A food stamp worker can help you complete the form later during your interview.
- If you qualify for food stamps, you will get the stamps no later than 30

days from the date the office got your application.

- If your household has little or no money and needs help right away, let the food stamp office know, because you may be able to get food stamps within a few days. Fill in all of the first page of the application, so a worker can see if you qualify for faster service.

- If you are applying for public assistance, you can apply for food stamps at the same time, in the welfare office.



2 HAVE AN INTERVIEW WITH A FOOD STAMP WORKER

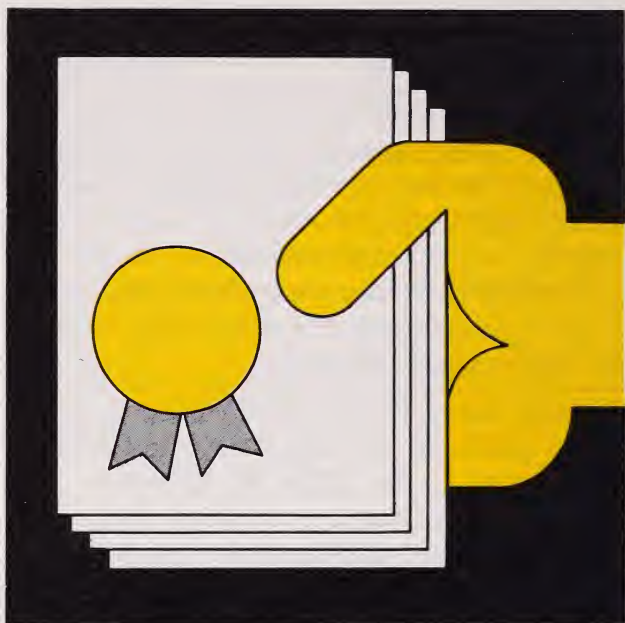
- After you have turned in your application, a worker will hold a confidential

interview with you or another member of your household.

● At the interview, the worker will explain the program rules and go over the information on your application. The worker will help you complete any parts of the form you have not filled out. Ask the worker to explain anything that you do not understand. It's important that you understand the rules.

● Most interviews are held at the food stamp office. If no one in your household can go to the office for an interview, an adult friend or relative who knows your circumstances may go to be interviewed for you.

● If you are 65 or older or disabled and you cannot go to the food stamp office and no one can go for you, let the office know. A worker will arrange to interview you at home or by telephone. Other people who cannot get to the office and who have no one to go for them may qualify for a home or telephone interview, too.



3 MEET ELIGIBILITY RULES AND PROVIDE PROOF THAT YOU ARE ELIGIBLE

● You will have to give the worker certain documents and information to prove that you are eligible. If you have trouble getting documents or information you need, the worker will help you. If the documents are not available, you may give the name of someone, such as your employer, who can confirm your statements.

Listed below are some of the basic eligibility rules and the kinds of proof you may be asked for.

Citizenship: U.S. citizens, legally permanent aliens, and certain other legal aliens may qualify. If members of your household are not U.S. citizens, you will have to provide proof of their status from the Immigration and

Naturalization Service.

Even if some members of your household do not meet this requirement, the members of your household who do may qualify for food stamps.

Work Registration: With certain exceptions, able-bodied people between 18 and 60 years of age must register for work, search for a job and accept an offer of a suitable job. The worker will explain which members of your household must register for work.

Resources: All households may have up to \$1,750 worth of resources. Households of two or more persons may have up to \$3,000 if at least one member is age 60 or older. Under food stamp rules, some resources are counted and some are not. The worker will explain which are counted.

Some resources that will **not** be counted are:

- Your home and surrounding lot.
- Household goods and personal belongings.
- Life insurance policies.

Examples of resources that **will** be counted are:

- Cash and checking and savings accounts.
- Stocks and bonds.
- Land and buildings, other than your home and lot, not used to produce income.

Proof: Your case may be processed faster if you bring to your interview proof of your countable assets, such as bank books and tax assessments for property other than your home and lot.

Income: Under food stamp rules, some types of income are counted and some are not. Only households with net monthly incomes below the allowable limits may qualify for food stamps. These limits go up as the size of the household increases and are adjusted twice a year to reflect changes in the cost of living.

Proof: You must provide proof of the income of all household members. Examples include:

- Most recent pay stubs, or employer's phone number.
- Benefit letters from Social Security, Veterans Administration, unemployment

compensation.

- *Pension information.*

Deductions: After adding all of your household's income, the worker will subtract certain deductions to see if your net monthly income falls below the limit for your household's size. The following deductions are allowed:

- To cover basic household expenses such as medical costs, a standard deduction will be subtracted for every household.
(*No proof is needed for this deduction.*)
- To cover work-related expenses and payroll taxes, a 20 percent deduction will be subtracted from income you earn.
- To cover dependent care and/or high shelter expenses, a deduction for actual costs, up to the maximum allowed, may be subtracted.
- Dependent care costs include child care and care for disabled adults, if these services are needed so that a household member can work, look for a job, or get training or education leading to a job.
- Shelter costs include rent or mortgage payments, utilities, property taxes and insurance on the structure, but not the contents, of a home.

Proof: Bills or records of payments for the following:

- *Dependent care, such as a babysitter, day care center, or attendant for a disabled adult.*
- *Rent or mortgage.*
- *Insurance on a home.*
- *Property taxes.*
- *Telephone, electricity, gas, oil, water, sewerage, garbage collection and installation costs for utilities.*

● **If your household meets all the eligibility rules and provides proof that it is eligible, the worker will figure out how many food stamps you will get. The amount will be based on your household's size and monthly income after deductions.**



4 RECEIVE A NOTICE THAT TELLS YOU IF YOU QUALIFY

- After interviewing you and reviewing your application, the food stamp office will send you a notice and a food stamp identification card.

- If you do not qualify for food stamps, the notice will explain why.

- If you do qualify, the notice will explain how many stamps you will get. It will also tell you how long you can get food stamps before you must reapply.

- If you think your application has been wrongly denied or that you have not received the correct amount of food stamps, you should tell the office. If they do not agree, you can ask for a fair hearing. For more information about fair hearings, see page 12 .



5 RECEIVE YOUR FOOD STAMPS

- If the office finds that you are eligible, you will get your stamps no later than 30 days from the date you first applied, unless you qualify for faster service.
- You will not have to pay for your stamps. They are issued at no cost to households.
- Food stamps are issued to households by several different methods. The food stamp worker will explain the methods your local office uses.
- If your local office requires you to pick up your food stamps, you will have to show your food stamp ID card when you go to get your stamps. If you cannot go to pick up your stamps, tell the worker at the time of your interview. You can name someone to pick them up for you.



6 SPEND YOUR FOOD STAMPS

- You can spend food stamps like cash for food at most stores that sell food.
- Food stamps can **only** be used to pay for food and for plants and seeds to grow food that your household can eat.
- Food stamps **cannot** be used to buy ineligible items, such as:
 - Alcoholic beverages
 - Tobacco or cigarettes
 - Household supplies, soaps and paper products
 - Vitamins and medicines
 - Any other non-food items
 - Food that will be eaten in the store
 - Hot foods that are ready-to-eat, like barbecued chicken
 - Pet foods
- When you spend your food stamps,

you will get a \$1 food stamp coupon back for every \$1 in change due. For amounts of 99¢ or less, you will receive cash change.



7 REPORT CHANGES IN YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES

- If you are found eligible for food stamps, you will be given a form for reporting certain changes in your household's circumstances.
- You must report changes promptly.
- You can report changes by calling the food stamp office. However, it is better to fill out the change report form and mail it to the office.

IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT THAT YOU REPORT CHANGES, SO THAT YOUR HOUSEHOLD RECEIVES THE

RIGHT AMOUNT OF FOOD STAMPS. IF YOU RECEIVE ANY EXTRA FOOD STAMPS BECAUSE YOU HAVE NOT REPORTED A CHANGE YOU WILL OWE THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM THE VALUE OF THESE STAMPS.

YOUR RIGHTS

You have the right to:

- **Receive an application the same day you ask for it.**
- **Have your application accepted immediately.**
- **Have an adult who knows your circumstances apply for you, if you cannot get to the food stamp office yourself.**
- **Have a home visit or a telephone interview if you are 65 or older or are disabled and you cannot get to the food stamp office or find someone to go for you.**
- **Get your food stamps within 30 days after you apply, if you are eligible.**
- **Get food stamps within a few days, if you are in immediate need and qualify for faster service.**
- **Receive fair treatment regardless of age, sex, race, color, handicap, religious creed, national origin, or political beliefs.**
- **Be notified in advance if the food**

stamp office is going to reduce or end your benefits.

● **Examine your own case file and a copy of the food stamp program rules.**

● **Have a fair hearing if you disagree with any action taken on your case.**

At a fair hearing you can explain to a hearing official why you disagree with an action the food stamp office has taken on your case.

If the hearing official decides you are right, you will continue to receive, or will begin to receive, the correct amount of food stamps. If the official decides the food stamp office is right, you will be asked to repay the value of any food stamps you were not entitled to receive.

You can ask the food stamp office for a fair hearing in writing, in person or over the phone.

The food stamp office will give you information about the hearing rules in your State.

You can ask a friend or relative or anyone else to help you prepare for the hearing and to attend the hearing with you.

In some cases, you can continue to receive your food stamps without a change while you are waiting for the hearing decision.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

- When you apply for food stamps, answer all questions completely and honestly.
- Provide proof that you are eligible.
- Report certain changes in your household's circumstances to the food stamp office promptly.
- Do not put your money or possessions in someone else's name in order to qualify for food stamps.
- Do not make changes on any food stamp cards or documents.
- Do not sell, trade, or give away your food stamps, or any food stamp cards or documents.
- Use food stamps only to buy eligible items.

PEOPLE WHO BREAK FOOD STAMP RULES MAY BE DISQUALIFIED FROM THE PROGRAM, FINED, IMPRISONED, OR ALL THREE.

